

Documents on Diplomacy: Resources

Background Information: *The China Hands and the Dixie Mission*

THE CHINA HANDS

The term “China Hand” originally referred to merchants in the treaty ports of 19th-century China, but evolved to reflect anyone with expert knowledge of the language, culture, and people of China. In the 1940s, the China Hands came to refer to a group of American diplomats, journalists, and soldiers who were known for their knowledge of China and influence on American policy before, during, and after World War II.

The China Hands during World War II were Foreign Service Officers of the United States Department of State, most of whom had experience in China, some of them going back to the 1920s. Since the general expectation was that the war would continue for perhaps another two years and that the invasion of Japan would be based in China, General Joseph Stilwell determined that American interest required liaison with the considerable military force of the communists.

At his behest, the Dixie Mission was sent to Yan'an in July 1944. Colonel David Barrett and John S. Service reported favorably on the strength and capabilities of the Chinese Communist Party compared with the Chinese Nationalists. This view was motivated not by sympathy with communism as a political or economic system, but with the view that Chinese communists were more popular and militarily effective than the Nationalists, who were wracked with corruption and incompetence. Communist leaders Mao Zedong and Zhou En-lai welcomed the Americans, and Mao gave Service an extensive interview expressing his desire for good relations and his eagerness for American aid. Many China Hands argued that it would be in American national interest to work with the communists if, as many China experts correctly expected, they gained power.

This view was opposed by the new U.S. Ambassador to China, Patrick Hurley. Hurley, a Republican recruited by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to promote a bipartisan China policy, initially felt there was no more difference between the Chinese communists and Nationalists than between the Democrats and Republicans in his home state of Oklahoma, but wanted to form a coalition government led by Chiang Kai-shek. He accused Col. David Barrett and Foreign Service Officers such as John Service, John Paton Davies, Jr., and John Emmerson of disloyalty and had them removed from China.

Excerpts from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China_Hands

THE DIXIE MISSION

The United States Army Observation Group, commonly known as the Dixie Mission, was the first U.S. effort to establish official relations with the Communist Party of China and the People's Liberation Army, then headquartered in the mountainous city of Yan'an. This mission was launched on 22 July 1944 during World War II, and lasted until 11 March 1947.

The Dixie Mission [officially] began with John Paton Davies, Jr.'s memo of January 15, 1944. [*Note: John Service, on temporary assignment in Washington, had proposed just such a mission in January 1943, but no action was taken until the following year.*] Davies, a Foreign Service Officer serving in the China Burma India Theater (CBI), called for the establishment of an observers' mission in Chinese Communist territory. Davies argued that: the communists offered attractive strategic benefits in the fight against Japan; and that the more the U.S. ignored the communists, the closer Yan'an—the 'capital' of CPC-held China—might interact more with the Soviet Union (USSR). With the support of Davies' superior, General Joseph Stilwell, this memorandum successfully convinced the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt to put the plan into motion.

John Service, while under Stilwell's command, served as a diplomatic observer for both Stilwell and the American Embassy in Chungking. Over the next three months, he sent a series of reports to Chungking, and sparked controversy immediately. Service praised the CPC and compared them to European socialists, rather than the feared USSR. Service credited the CPC for a clean and superior society in stark contrast to the corruption and chaos he saw in the Nationalist areas controlled by Chiang Kai-shek. After visiting Yan'an, Service advocated that the United States should work with the forces opposed to the Nationalists, such as the Communists, though he did not advocate abandoning Chiang. How did the United States Army Observation Group become known as the “Dixie Mission?” One explanation is that the name was related to the number of Southerners amongst the mission's personnel. John Davies declared in his memoir that the name originated from the China Hands being in “rebel” (CPC) territory – a reference to the southern Confederate States of America.

Excerpts from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dixie_Mission